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2006 WOMAN OF THE YEAR

# GLORIA MOLINA

Los Angeles County Supervisor

Our 2006 ELITE WOMEN:

Taking Responsibility to New Heights

SBA'S BUDGET DOWNSHIFT

ROOM FOR PROFITS IN HOTELS

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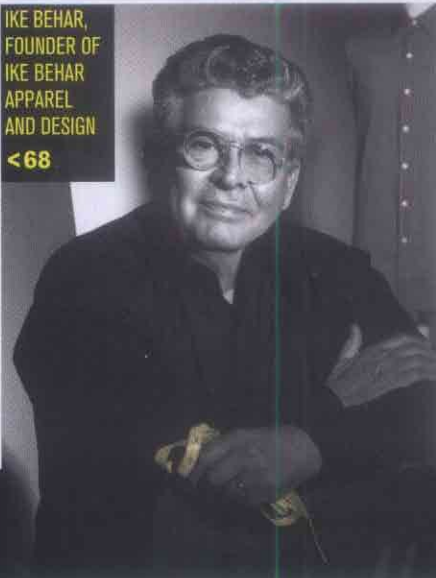
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**WOMAN OF THE YEAR**

**A  
DAY  
IN THE  
LIFE OF THE  
WOMAN OF THE YEAR**



## Gloria Molina personifies the progress of Hispanics in Los Angeles; a feat that won her the 2006 Hispanic Business magazine Woman of the Year award.

// BY JOEL RUSSELL

**A**s an economic engine, Los Angeles County looms larger than a lot of sovereign nations. It has a population of 10.2 million people, of which 44.6 percent are Hispanic. In 2004, it had a local GDP of \$400 billion, an employee pool of nearly 4 million workers, and a transportation system with more than 7 million registered trucks and cars, according to the Los Angeles County Economic Development Corp. It is the largest manufacturing center in the United States and the biggest port for international trade.

It also ranks as the largest Hispanic market in the nation. Advertisers spent more than \$584 million to reach Los Angeles Hispanics last year (see "Media Markets," December 2005 issue). In terms of affluence, "Hispanic households in Los Angeles have slightly higher income" than Hispanics elsewhere — 8.5 percent of them with incomes above \$100,000 according to the HispanTelligence® report "The U.S. Hispanic Economy in Transition: Facts, Figures, and Trends."

### Hispanic Progress Personified

Gloria Molina personifies the progress Hispanics have achieved in Southern California. Her rise from Chicana activist to chair of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors in 2005 (a position that rotates annually among the supervisors) parallels the growth of Hispanic influence and affluence throughout the Southwest. That explains, in part, why she is winner of the 2006 Hispanic Business magazine Woman of the Year award.

The other part of the explanation is Ms. Molina's high-intensity management responsibility. The county's budget for 2005-06 totals \$19.88 billion. As board chair and supervisor of L.A. County's huge First District, Ms. Molina has focused both on how that money is spent —

and working the angles on how to secure more.

She considers her biggest victory of the past two years the allocation of half a billion dollars in federal funding for a six-mile extension of the L.A. County Light Rail system to her constituents in East Los Angeles.

The coup, which also produces many thousands of area jobs through 2009, became reality in late December 2005 as Ms. Molina officiated at the tunnel dig kickoff. A crowning moment of her term as chair. "We've been working on it for 15 years, but now we're building it!" she exults. "Eastside residents are some of the most transit-dependent in all of L.A. County. The extension will connect them to the rest of the county's light rail network."

Another major victory came last November with the election of Antonio Villaraigosa as mayor of Los Angeles. Although Ms. Molina doesn't take credit for the win, her support and example certainly helped. "That's part of the leadership responsibility I have," she says. "We all have worked for so many years to see Latinos in these positions of power."

In fact, it was Ms. Molina's 1991 election as the first Hispanic woman on the Los Angeles Board of Supervisors that marked a nationally visible step forward in the region's Hispanic political empowerment. Her district, with its 60-plus cities and communities, including a good portion of the city of Los Angeles, and its downtown area, is 74.9 percent Hispanic, according to 2000 Census figures.

"She represents the major change in demographics in Los Angeles — namely, the growing Latino population," says Martin Saiz, professor of political science at California State University in Northridge. "Any politician at the elected level in Los Angeles County is a significant national politician, almost by default. This is the »



## WOMAN OF THE YEAR



**“MY ADVICE TO OTHER LATINAS IS TO PREPARE FOR EVERYTHING AND ROLL WITH THE PUNCHES. IT WAS NEVER EASY, BUT THERE’S GREAT SATISFACTION IN LEADERSHIP.”**

» largest county in the country in terms of population. ... That alone gives her prominence. There are not many people in the country who have that kind of constituency.”

### A “Very Powerful Board”

“Her getting elected as supervisor was almost as big as Antonio [Villaraigosa] becoming mayor – bigger, in terms of power,” says Henry Lozano, the former chief of staff to Congressmen Edward Roybal and Xavier Becerra. “There are only five [supervisors] in L.A. County, and those people have power,” says Mr. Lozano, who first met Ms. Molina when she was a high school student. “Some would say they have legislative, executive, and quasi-judicial powers. So that’s just a very powerful board.”

Raised in Pico Rivera, a heavily Hispanic suburb east of Los Angeles, Ms. Molina studied at East Los Angeles College and Rio Hondo College in Whittier, California. She began her political career in the 1970s with the Chicano movement, and worked both at the White House and for the San Francisco Department of Health and Human Services. She returned to Los Angeles and was elected

first to the California State Assembly in 1982 and then to the Los Angeles City Council in 1987 before running for supervisor.

Mr. Lozano recalls a meeting in the early 1980s at an East L.A. restaurant, where about eight local Hispanic political players tried to choose a candidate for state assembly. “We threw out names, and someone said, ‘Why not get a woman to run? Why not Gloria?’” he says.

### Fiscal Fighter

As a campaigner, Ms. Molina works hard and “articulates very well,” according to Mr. Lozano, but she has a reputation for turning issues into a fight. One time at a political event Mr. Lozano said he heard criticism that she was too negative, and Ms. Molina’s husband Ron Martinez responded: “Right after this election, we’re going to send her to charm school.” But she won that election – and every one since.

Ms. Molina has advocated for fiscal responsibility by ending “pension spiking” (inflating salaries to determine pension benefits) to save the county nearly \$100 million. On the spending side, she advocates funding for parks, healthcare, and schools. “Education is »



## WOMAN OF THE YEAR



**"SHE REPRESENTS  
THE MAJOR CHANGE IN DEMOGRAPHICS IN  
LOS ANGELES - NAMELY, THE GROWING LATINO POPULATION.  
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SIGNIFICANT NATIONAL  
POLITICIAN, ALMOST BY DEFAULT."**

**MARTIN SAIZ,  
CAL STATE NORTHRIDGE**

» by far the most significant issue for Latinos," she says. "In many public schools, we're not a minority anymore, we're the majority. But the quality has dropped due to inattention from the federal government in funding."

### **Contracting Hound**

In economic development, her office conducts constant outreach to encourage contracting with local government and transportation projects. She also works to bring large companies to the inner city. Recently, she supported the construction of La Alameda Shopping Center, a \$59 million project in Walnut Park that will bring big-name stores to the neighborhood. "It's a matter of synergy," she says. "You need small businesses, but you also need national

retailers to anchor these shopping centers. We work to facilitate that."

At the national level, Ms. Molina helped coordinate the Democratic National Convention in 2000, and served as vice-chair of the Democratic National Committee until 2004. "Her passion and commitment to social justice have extended her reach well beyond the borders of Los Angeles County," comments California State Assembly Speaker Fabian Nuñez. "I am proud to know her, and call her one of my most important mentors."

"There weren't people doing what I did, so I had to learn along the way," concludes Ms. Molina regarding her journey to prominence. "My advice to other Latinas is to prepare for everything and roll with the punches. It was never easy, but there's great satisfaction in leadership." □